

UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

Fort Hamilton, N.Y. 11252

THE BLACK MUSLIMS

by

Chaplain(LTC) James C. Grant Jr.

Submitted for Writing Requirement

The Black Muslim movement is of interest and concern to the United States Army for two reasons.

First, knowledge of the movement is necessary to anyone in the Army, especially commanders and chaplains who must deal with those claiming to be Black Muslims.

Secondly, such knowledge is helpful in understanding one extreme point of view in current Black thinking. If the commander or the chaplain, or anyone connected with race relations -- and this should mean anyone serving in or in any way connected to the Army -- can sense the appeal of the Black Muslim movement, he will understand to some degree how many Blacks of today think and feel.

Which way to the Promised Land?

"Separate from the white devils," Elijah Muhammad said.

"Demonstrate," said the youth of Oklahoma City.

"Register and vote," said the Negro power structure.

"Fight fire with fire," said Robert Williams.¹

* * * * *

Made in the wake of a National Negro Summit Conference which had been called by the National Newspaper Publishers Association for May 12 and 13, 1958, the statement clearly pointed out four choices open to the Black people of America in their struggle for racial equality.

They could separate from the white society which had, since the beginning of the republic, held them in social, political and economic subjugation.

They could take to the streets, the bus lines and the lunch counters of the nation, demonstrating publicly in the hope that such actions would call their plight to the attention of those who had denied them and would force changes

¹ Lerone Bennett Jr., Confrontation: Black and White (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1965), p. 245.

for the better.

They could register and vote, working within the established political structure to build a power bloc which eventually would make its weight felt in legislative halls on both national and local scenes.

Or, as suggested by a Black militant, they could arm themselves, applying to the white community the same tactics of force to which the Blacks themselves had been subjected.

The two extreme positions were those represented by Williams and Elijah Muhammad, a frail, delicately featured Black who headed the then relatively unknown "Nation of Islam." The idea of Black violence was not new to the American scene; in race riots prior to that time, the Black had shown a desperate willingness to use force when conditions became more than he thought he could endure. This threat of violence was an ugly infection lying close under the skin of American society and, although the infection burst only at infrequent times, white society was aware of it.

Such was not the status of the Nation of Islam. This movement, known today as the "Black Muslim" movement, did not come into general public view until it was "discovered" by mass media following the freedom rides of 1961 in Alabama and Mississippi.² It was, despite the lack of public

² Ibid., p. 273.

recognition and interest, however, a movement which had been growing steadily among American Blacks since its birth in Detroit during the early 1930's.

In 1930, a door-to-door peddler of silks appeared in the Black ghettos of Detroit. Who he was or from where he had come was never established with undeniable accuracy. He was known by various names: Mr. Farrad Mohammad, Mr. F. Mohammad Ali, Prof. Ford, Mr. Wali Farrad and W.D. Fard.³ Some said he was a Jamaican Negro whose father was a Syrian Moslem. Others said he was a Palestinian Arab. Still others said he was the son of wealthy parents in the tribe of Koreish, the tribe from which had come the prophet Mohammad.⁴

Even though his origins were clouded, his message was clear. He had been sent, he proclaimed to those who admitted him to their homes, to wake "Uncle," the sleeping Black nation.⁵ It was a message of freedom and deliverance, the promise of a land in which the Black man, so long held in captivity, would be master and not slave. He would have the power and status which Allah had intended for him since the beginning of creation.

The message was a seed dropped into fertile ground. Within three years, this itinerant out-of-nowhere peddler

³ C. Eric Lincoln, The Black Muslims in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 10.

⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵ Ibid.

had formed an organization so effective that he could retire from its active management. His Nation of Islam -- the term "Black Muslim" was not to be coined until 1956⁶ -- had training classes for both men and women, a "University of Islam" which offered elementary and high school education to its followers and the "Fruit of Islam," a para-military organization which became the movement's arm of enforcement, its elite shock troop.⁷

Why this immediate success for Fard and his separatist movement? Two factors appear. First, his message was one of hope, heard by Blacks ignored, held down and long denied by the society in which they lived. Secondly, Fard appeared at a time when the memory of two other movements still was fresh in the minds of many Blacks.

The first, and least successful, of these movements was that of the Moorish Science Temples. Founded in 1913 by Timothy Drew, also known as Noble Drew Ali, this philosophy taught that Blacks were really Asiatics. It was militant in its beginning, but after a white backlash became less so, one factor which led to its decline in both prominence and power.⁸

The other movement arose in the troubled times after

⁶ Ibid., p. iv.

⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

World War I, times marked by race riots and the resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan. Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association at a 1920 convention in New York City. It had great early success but, in the face of opposition from upper-class Negroes and Garvey's conviction, jailing and deportation following charges of mail fraud, soon faded from the scene.⁹ The note which he struck did not disappear; it was to be repeated by Elijah Muhammad, the one who became Fard's right-hand man in the Nation of Islam.

For Garvey was convinced, as is Elijah Muhammad, that the Negro can hope for neither peace nor dignity while he lives in a white society. Like Muhammad, he saw only one solution: the establishment of a separate nation "so strong as to strike fear" into the hearts of the oppressor white race.¹⁰

In the early 1920's, a Black family migrated from Georgia to Detroit. One of the thirteen children in that family was Elijah Poole, the man who was to become Elijah Muhammad and Fard's trusted assistant.¹¹

Poole, known at various times as Gulam Bogans, Muhammad Rassouli, and Elijah Muck Muhd, rose quickly within the movement. In 1932, he was sent to Chicago where the movement's Tempe No. Two was located.¹² Poole assumed leadership of the movement after Fard disappeared, a dis-

⁹ Ibid., pp. 59, 65.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹² Ibid., p. 186.

appearance never explained by the Black Muslims or by the police.¹³ Fard was deified, becoming an incarnation of Allah, and Poole took upon himself the mantle of prophet. Although there was some resistance to this assumption of leadership, Poole controlled the movement, solidifying his power until his position became unchallengeable.

During the period from 1934 to 1952-53, the movement grew quietly, escaping public notice but coming to the increasing attention of the Black community. In 1952-53, the first of two events occurred which was to change the force and thrust of the movement: the conversion to the Nation of Islam of a Black convict, Malcolm Little. The second happening was, as mentioned earlier, the "discovery" of the movement by the white community in the wake of racial unrest in the southern United States during the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Malcolm Little was the son of a Baptist minister who never held a regular pulpit, but who had always done supply work. His father, a dedicated organizer for Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, had taken the family to East Lansing, Mich., where he continued his work for the Garvey organization. There was trouble from a local hate society called the Black Legion. The Little home, outside the Negro district, was burned and the Littles forced to

¹³ Ibid., p. 15.

move. Shortly thereafter, Malcolm's father was killed; some Negroes in Lansing whispered that he had been murdered because of his activities on behalf of the U.N.I.A.¹⁴

With his father gone and his mother soon to become hopelessly insane and confined to a state hospital, Little was to grow up in a world ruled by a "fast buck" and "quick hustle." Swinging between the Black communities of Boston and New York's Harlem, he was both pimp and pusher, a career which came to an abrupt end in February, 1946, when he was sentenced to ten years in Charlestown State Prison in Massachusetts following his conviction for burglary.¹⁵ Later, when he wrote his autobiography, he was to reflect that the average sentence given whites convicted of the same crime was two years, but he was Black and, perhaps even more importantly where the sentencing was concerned, two of his accomplices in the crime were married middle-class white women with whom he had a long-standing and intimate relationship.

It was while he was in prison that the seemingly impossible happened: Malcolm Little was converted, the change in his life as startling as though he had gone to bed a Black and awakened the following morning as a white man. Paroled in August, 1952, he returned to his family in Detroit and became involved in the day-to-day affairs of the local Black Muslim

¹⁴ Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

congregation.¹⁶ His star was on the rise within the Nation of Islam.

After serving as chief minister of temples in Boston and Philadelphia, Malcolm, now known as "Malcolm X," was put in charge of the critically important Temple No. Seven in Harlem. Recognizing his disciple's devotion, his missionary zeal and his organizational genius, Elijah Muhammad soon came to rely on Malcolm X and made him "Chief Minister" within the Nation of Islam, his No. One trouble-shooter and spokesman.

This happy, hand-in-glove relationship between master, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad -- and there never was any discernable doubt as to who was master -- and the disciple, Malcolm X, continued until 1963. What triggered the split was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22.

Several days after the assassination, Malcolm X, appearing in Elijah Muhammad's place, spoke to a large gathering at the Manhattan Center in New York . After the speech, there was a question-and-answer period in which he was asked what he thought about the President's assassination.

"Without a second thought," Malcolm writes in his autobiography, "I said what I honestly felt -- that it was, as I saw it, a case of the 'chickens coming home to roost'."¹⁷

That was all a shocked American public heard. In the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 305.

resultant uproar against the Black Muslims, made all the more serious because Elijah Muhammad had forbidden his ministers to speak of the slaying, Malcolm was suspended from the exercise of any leadership function within the Nation of Islam, ostensibly for a period of 90 days. That suspension was, as it turned out, permanent.

Most likely Malcolm's remarks, which were widely misinterpreted because they were taken out of context, were the excuse rather than the reason for the split between master and disciple. Malcolm, the thoroughly convinced, non-questioning believer, had become disenchanted with Elijah Muhammad because of rumors regarding Elijah Muhammad's relationship with three of his former secretaries, rumors which he said the master confirmed in a face-to-face confrontation in Phoenix in April, 1963.¹⁸

There was another factor in the break-up of the relationship. It was said by some within the Nation of Islam that Malcolm was making a personal grab for power, that he was usurping the position reserved for the Prophet. Whatever the truth of this assertion -- Malcolm denies it strongly in his autobiography, the fact is that Malcolm had been, to a large degree, responsible for the rapid growth of the movement. Although there was -- and is today -- a lack of a clearly defined power structure within the Nation of Islam,

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 302-3.

Malcolm stood head-and-shoulders above everyone else in both prestige and accomplishment, out-stripping even Elijah Muhammad's sons and his son-in-law Raymond Sherriff, head of the elitist Fruit of Islam.

Was the split the result of the struggle for power? Even at this date, nearly ten years later, the closed-mouth secretive attitude of the Black Muslims permits no definitive answer.

In April, 1964, Malcolm made the traditional, orthodox Moslem pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, an experience which made permanent the split between himself and Elijah Muhammad. As a result of his experiences and observations on the pilgrimage, he came to believe that brotherhood between all men, a tenet of orthodox Moslem faith, was possible, that Elijah Muhammad was wrong in his insistence that Black and white could live only as they were separated.¹⁹ The split which heretofore had been disciplinary and organizational in nature was now theological and thus beyond repair.

On Feb. 21, 1965, the issue between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad was settled once and for all. Malcolm was gunned down in the Audubon Ballroom in Upper Harlem by three assailants, two of whom were later identified as Black Muslims Thomas 15X Johnson and Norman 3X Butler.²⁰

From this point on, the rapid expansion of the Nation of

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 345-6

²⁰ Arthur Haley, "Epilogue," The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 445.

Islam slowed considerably. The defection of Malcolm X, his personal challenge to the authoritarian movement and his destruction, coupled with rapid and obvious progress in the field of civil rights, shoved the Black Muslims off the front page and out og the public eye. Obviously, the movement did not die.

What do the Black Muslims believe?

At the heart of their doctrine is the belief, first stated by Garvey, that there is no hope for the Black man if he attempts to live in and with the white society which has denied him those benefits and that position which God (Allah) intended that he enjoy. The teaching of Fard, the spiritual father of Elijah Muhammad, was that the Blacks in America were "lost sheep," separated for more than 400 years from the Nation of Islam because they had been carried to this country by white slave-masters. As their hell was on earth, so also was the Devil, the white race which was bred from the Black, original man some 6,000 years earlier. It was the Blacks, not the whites, who were God's children, who were, in fact, gods themselves.²¹

Indicative of this hatred of the white man is the fact that those who have become Black Muslims are given new names to replace "slave names" given them by their former masters. Elijah Poole becomes Elijah Muhammad; Malcolm Little becomes

²¹ Malcolm X, Autobiography, p. 209.

Malcolm X. As the symbol "X" represents the unknown quantity in mathematics, so it stands for the individual's true, but currently unknown, name which will be revealed by Allah or by Allah's messenger, Elijah Muhammad, at some future time.²² If in one temple there are several converts with the same first name, the second will be named "2X."

Although their theology differs from that of orthodox Moslems in that they profess no belief in the brotherhood of all men, have no distinct concept of God, see no heaven and no after-life, the Black Muslims do follow certain Islamic practices. The eating of pork is strictly forbidden;²³ grocery stores and meat markets operated by Black Muslims will not sell, let alone stock, pork products.²⁴ Prayer must be offered five times daily, six if the believer arises during the night; as those prayers are offered, the believer must face eastward towards the holy city of Mecca. Also, the ritual ablutions required of the orthodox Moslem faithful must be followed by Black Muslims.²⁵

What cannot be questioned is the ability of the Black Muslims to produce miracles in the rehabilitation of those

²² Louis Farrakhan, interviewed on "Soul," WNBC-TV, Channel 4, New York City, Oct. 29, 1972.

²³ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 81.

²⁴ Advertisement, Muhammad Speaks, Nov. 24, 1972, p. 27.

²⁵ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, pp. 80-81.

who turn to them.

During his interview on New York's WNBC-TV Channel Four television show "Soul," Louis Farrakhan, presiding minister of Temple No. Seven in Harlem and a leading spokesman for Elijah Muhammad today, was asked about Black Muslims and drugs.

"Junkies," he replied, "never go back to drugs as long as they stay with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad." Then, turning to his followers who had jammed the studio, he asked one to stand. As the clean-cut, impressively dressed man stood, Farrakhan said, "Brother Raymond is an example." With obvious pride, Brother Raymond said that he had not been on narcotics since becoming a member of the Nation of Islam. In response to a question by Farrakhan, more than a few hands were raised in the audience to indicate others who, like Brother Raymond, had kicked the habit without backsliding.²⁶

"You never see a Muslim," the Black author and reporter Louis Lomax writes in his book, The Negro Revolt, "without a clean shirt and coat and tie. You never see a Muslim drink, smoke, dance or use dope, a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim man, a Muslim man with a woman other than his wife, without some means of income, a man who will not aid any Black woman he sees in trouble."²⁷

If any further evidence of the rehabilitative power

²⁶ Farrakhan, "Soul," Oct. 29, 1972.

²⁷ Louis E. Lomax, The Negro Revolt (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1962), p. 176.

inherent in the Black Muslim movement is needed, there is the obvious example of Malcolm X, a man whose life was changed completely by Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.

When "theology" is taken to mean not only what you believe about God but also what you believe God wants of you, then one very important facet of Black Muslim theology is the drive for economic self-sufficiency. In their demand for and dream of an entirely separate Black economy, they recognize they must learn whatever the white man can teach them and use that knowledge to out-strip him.²⁸

Advertising in the newspaper, Muhammad Speaks, reflects this drive for economic separation. There are Black Muslim restaurants, wholesale markets selling produce from Black Muslim farms, clothing factories, print shops, dry cleaning shops, department stores and supermarkets.²⁹

To get the skill required for this economic development, the Muslims have recently appealed to a class they have heretofore largely ignored, the middle-class Black professionals. In a Chicago meeting on Oct. 2, 1972, Elijah Muhammad asked leading business and professional men to lend their skills to the movement. The letter inviting them to the meeting was written by Farrakhan; it told these men they would not have to join the Muslims in order to work with them. This was a change

²⁸ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 20.

²⁹ Advertisements, Muhammad Speaks, Nov. 24, 1972, pp. 6, 8, 9, 10, 19.

from the earlier Muslim position.³⁰

Perhaps even more important to the future growth of the movement are those ads which call for qualified engineers and technicians to join. They also call for experienced cattle, chicken and food raisers. One advertisement announces their willingness to rent, lease or buy up to one million acres of farmland in the mid-West or South.³¹

The firm which called for the sale or leasing of land, Progressive Land Developers, is already in the farming business. Following an earlier purchase of land in Georgia, the company in 1969 bought two farms totaling more than 900 acres in St. Clair County, Alabama, a move which took the Muslims into one-sided and open conflict with their new white neighbors. Cattle mysteriously were killed. Crops and barns were burned. Harassing legal action, both public and private, was instituted.³² Despite these difficulties, the Muslims remained, their presence witness to their determination to gain their economic independence.

Surprisingly enough, the Black Muslims did not retaliate. Their response was, in effect, one of "leave us alone." This, however, would come as no surprise to those who have looked closely at their public pronouncements and their record.

³⁰ New York Times, Oct. 2, 1972, p. 24.

³¹ Advertisement, Muhammad Speaks, Nov. 24, 1972, p. 29.

³² Jerry C. Bledsoe, "A Brother's Keeper," Esquire, November, 1971, pp. 81-94, 216-27.

Although the potential for violence is present, the Black Muslims have not sought an out-and-out confrontation with white society. Indeed, one of the factors involved in the break between Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X was Elijah Muhammad's insistence on a go-slow, no-confrontation attitude, something which Malcolm X and the younger, more militant Blacks found hard to accept.³³

Not only did Elijah Muhammad's unrelenting separatist position cause some degree of uneasiness within the Nation of Islam, but it put the Black Muslims at odds with the mainstream of the Black community, a cause of major concern to "recognized" Black leadership.³⁴ Although he seeks acceptance and respectability, Elijah Muhammad seemingly is little worried by their concern. He has rejected the National Urban League as an organization created and controlled by whites.³⁵ He has reservations about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People although he has shown himself willing to cooperate with it.³⁶ And, he opposed the sit-ins and passive resistance of Martin Luther King.³⁷

³³ George Breitman, The Last Year of Malcolm X (New York: Shoken Books, 1967), p. 18.

³⁴ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 136.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

The rejection of King's thinking is not unexpected. The Black Muslims have cast aside Christianity as the white man's religion which has been used to keep the Blacks in subjugation. Yet, Christianity has been the greatest source of opposition to the Black Muslims because the Blacks of America have known no other religion.³⁸ Nevertheless, Elijah Muhammad has put this opposition on the defense. Christian pastors, whether Black or white, cannot escape the implications of what he has been saying about their Christian faith. No one really has answered his criticism of Christianity: "By their fruits, ye shall know them."³⁹

The challenge of the Black Muslims is not only to Christianity, but to the total structure of existent society. They are taught to obey all constituted authority, even that of the whites, until the Black nations return to power.⁴⁰ Yet, there is the feeling that this position in regard to authority is one of expediency; certainly it is not one of unquestioned obedience and surrender. It is an attitude of "Let us alone to go our own separate way and we won't be of any trouble, but you'll have all the trouble you want if you in any way attack or hinder us."

Defiance of civil authority on the part of the Black Muslims has been seen clearly in one area only. Where the

³⁸ Ibid., p. 206.

³⁹ Lomax, The Negro Revolt, p. 173.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 83.

Black Muslims do not object, for instance, to paying taxes or obeying traffic laws or zoning regulations, they do reject service in the Armed Forces, something which comes as no surprise. It is a course of action indicated by their rejection of white society and by the statements of their leaders which have carried the weight of authority.

Fard taught his followers that they were not Americans, that they owed no allegiance to the American flag.⁴¹ Elijah Muhammad, who served nearly four years in a federal prison after being jailed for sedition in 1942, said World War II was not a battle for the American Negro; his battle, Muhammad declared, was the "Battle of Armageddon" which would be fought in the wilderness of North America, a battle for freedom, justice and equality.⁴² When Malcolm X, with the "help" of the F.B.I., registered for selective service after his release from prison, he listed himself as a conscientious objector. Did he know, a draft board clerk asked, what it meant to be a conscientious objector? Malcolm X replied "that when the white man asked me to go off somewhere and fight and maybe die to preserve the way the white man treated the Black man in America, then my conscience made me object."⁴³

That the attitude has been adopted by the rank-and-file was shown in a statement made by Byron Rushing who chose

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴² Ibid., p. 188.

⁴³ Malcolm X, Autobiography, p. 205.

alternate service as a conscientious objector during the Vietnamese war. He was, he said, "giving enemas to whiteys because I refuse to participate as a dumb mercenary in godless white democracy's war against our yellow brothers."⁴⁴

Much better known is the case of boxing's former heavyweight champion, Muhammad Ali, the ex-Cassius Clay. A 1964 convert to the Nation of Islam, he refused induction in 1967. In June, 1971, the Supreme Court reversed the conviction on grounds that Ali had not received a fair trial;⁴⁵ it did not rule on his contention that he was entitled to conscientious objector status because he was a Black Muslim minister.⁴⁶ However, in light of the Walsh decision of 1970 which said that moral or ethical objection to war was as valid as was religious objection, it seems likely that, had the court ruled on the validity of Ali's religious beliefs, the ruling would have been in his favor.⁴⁷

Where there is no question as to the relationship between the Nation of Islam and Christianity, the position of the Black Muslims as regards Judaism is ambivalent. While there is no specific hatred for the Jew as Jew, they do resent the fact that some Jews live within the Black community; they also believe Jews dominate the Blacks economically.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Byron Rushing, "I Was Born," in The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays, ed. by Floyd B. Barbour (Boston: Porter-Sergeant Publisher, 1968), p. 233.

⁴⁵ New York Times, July 4, 1971, sec. 4, p. 3.

⁴⁶ New York Times, June 29, 1971, p. 1.

⁴⁷ New York Times, June 28, 1971, p. 41.

⁴⁸ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 165.

What is open to question, however, is the relationship of the Black Muslims to the orthodox Moslem faith as it is seen primarily in the Islamic countries of the Middle East. The same question, put another way, is whether or not the Black Muslims are a legitimate Islamic sect. While there has been no formal ruling by any authoritative Islamic body, there are several factors which point towards the Islamic legitimacy of the Black Muslims.

The initial reaction of orthodox Moslem leaders in the United States to the Black Muslims was one of outright rejection, a position later abandoned; still, there is no fraternal acceptance.⁴⁹ Significantly, from the viewpoint of "overseas" Islam, both Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X were permitted to make the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca, a privilege granted only to the genuine faithful.

"It is likely," C. Eric Lincoln writes in his book, The Black Muslims in America, "that Moslem theologians will find the Black Muslims within the pale, a legitimate if somewhat heretical sect. The fact that orthodox Moslems in America reject the movement has no real significance."⁵⁰

The critical question regarding the Black Muslim movement is the threat which it poses today to the whole fabric of American society.

⁴⁹ Lomax, The Negro Revolt, p. 168.

⁵⁰ Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 220.

As far as the Armed Forces are concerned, the Black Muslims pose no real threat to order and discipline except as they challenge by their very existence a value system held as deeply as their own. It does not seem probable commanders, or chaplains for that matter, will find themselves involved with many Blacks who give primary allegiance to the Nation of Islam.

When the Selective Service System was functioning, the probability of involvement was much higher. Entering the Armed Forces, particularly the Army, was not a matter of free choice; the individual either reported for induction or faced prosecution for his refusal to accept service. In this situation, some Black Muslims were taken into the service, a choice they would not have made had there been any viable option.

Since Selective Service has been moth-balled and the various services, again particularly the Army, seek an all-volunteer force, it is not likely that many Black Muslims voluntarily will raise their right hands to take the oath of allegiance, the very nature of their professed faith mitigating against such action. The pattern of their relationship to society, and the Armed Service are a part of that society, clearly has been one of withdrawal. Rather than do battle with Whitey's society in the hope of forcing change, the pattern of most Black organizations today and a strategy now pushed by some of the younger members of the Nation of Islam, they choose to withdraw, waiting for the white-dominated society to fall, as inevitably in their view it must, of its own dead

weight.

Rather than face confrontation with newly-inducted Black Muslims who would challenge the structure and authority of the Armed Services, the commander, and the chaplain as well, may find himself involved with the Black who, after entering the service, has been converted to the Nation of Islam. As shown by their efforts in civilian society, the Black Muslims are missionary in spirit, reaching out especially to those who particularly would feel themselves victimized by white society, i.e. the inmate in the state or federal prison, the narcotics addict and other easily identifiable as outcasts. In their view, the serviceman, especially the draftee who is in uniform against his will, would be such a "target," another example of an oppressed Black being forced to support a white racist society. However, there is no indication in Black Muslim literature that any of the service have been singled out for attack in this manner.

Should the commander or chaplain be faced with a Black Muslim, there is a pattern, part of which has been established indirectly, which would be a guide to action.

If a Black already in uniform is converted, it is more likely he passively would withdraw his cooperation rather than become an "agitator" and thus a "threat" to the unit. Two courses of action, both established in regulations, can be followed. If the convert does become a disciplinary problem, his case can be handled by regular administrative procedures; if he claims his new faith will not let him serve, he can be

treated in exactly the same fashion as any other serviceman seeking conscientious objector status.

It is possible, although not probable, that the serviceman-convert would choose to serve out his term of service, claiming those privileges which permit all to exercise freely their religious faith. There would be no problem as far as clothing and hair styles are concerned; Black Muslims require no special clothing -- a small, lapel-type identification badge is not an absolute necessity -- and demand that the hair be closely cropped while permitting only a small, neatly-trimmed moustache. These demands would pose no problem to the military society.

Somewhat more difficult is the matter of the diet which must be pork-free. However, this may be handled in the same manner as are dietary requirements of other religious groups, orthodox Jews for instance. Indeed, it has been suggested that a Jewish chaplain, if available, supervise the meeting of Black Muslim dietary requirements.

Treatment of and response to the Black Muslims within the military ought to be predicated on two reasonable assumptions.

First, even though their theology is neither orthodox nor emotionally reassuring to those outside the Nation of Islam, Black Muslims are members of a legitimate religious sect which is Islamic in nature. Thus, they can be treated as are members of more readily recognizable Islamic groups. Holding to an Islamic faith has not been in the past a bar

to service; an opinion has been expressed by the Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains that no compromise of faith is required of Muslims serving in the Army.⁵¹

The second assumption is that the serviceman who claims Black Muslim affiliation will be a disciplined person whose own personal behavior will reflect the high moral standards of the Nation of Islam. He will not use narcotics in any form, including alcohol, and, reflecting the practices of his civilian brothers and sisters, will take pride in his personal appearance. He will not wear, or insist on, a beard, a particular hairstyle or identification emblems or symbols.

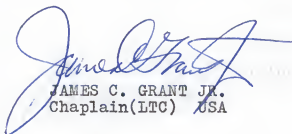
Thus, considered in the light of previous actions, the Black Muslims cannot be considered a threat to any of the Armed Services -- except in their challenge to the concept and philosophies undergirding those services. Where individuals in the Armed Services are concerned, the challenge is more emotional and philosophic than pragmatic.

Neither can the Nation of Islam be considered a threat to the American government or economy. It does not preach a violent overthrow of the government. Though Black Muslims do speak of a "Battle of Armageddon" and predict eventual downfall of the white man, they do so only in an eschatological sense. What they do see, although they have not reached the stage

⁵¹ Historical Review, 1 July 65-31 Dec 66 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1967), p. 277.

where it is possible, is total and complete separation between Blacks and whites. In this respect, they are willing to wait for time to take its inevitable toll; the downfall of the white man and his society as they know it now.

What the Black Muslims do threaten is the concept that the wrongs inflicted by society can be remedied, that the reason and grounds for protest, regardless of however active or passive that protest may be, can be eliminated. For, as Lincoln has written, the Black Muslims are "... a unique movement: a dynamic social protest that moves upon a religious vehicle. The movement's main emphases are upon social action. Yet it is nonetheless essentially a religion -- a religion of protest."⁵²



JAMES C. GRANT JR.
Chaplain(LTC) USA

⁵² Lincoln, The Black Muslims, p. 246.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources Cited

- Bennett, Lerone, Jr. Confrontation: Black and White. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1965.
- Bledsoe, Jerry C. "A Brother's Keeper." Esquire. November, 1971.
- Breitman, George. The Last Year of Malcolm X. New York: Shoken Books. 1967.
- Farrakhan, Louis. Interview on "Soul," WNBC-TV, Channel Four, New York City, Oct. 29, 1972.
- Haley, Arthur. "Epilogue." The Autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- Historical Review, 1 July-31 Dec 66. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1967.
- Lincoln, C. Eric. The Black Muslims in America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.
- Lomax, Louis E. The Negro Revolt. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1962.
- Muhammad Speaks. Advertisements. Nov. 24, 1972.
- New York Times. Articles. June 28, June 29, July 4, 1971; October 2, 1972.
- Rushing, Byron. "I Was Born." The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays. Boston: Porter Sergeant Publisher, 1962.
- X, Malcolm. The Autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Consulted, Not Cited

- Chapman, Abraham, ed. Black Voices. New York: New American Library, 1968.
- Drimmer, Melvin, ed. Black History: A Reappraisal. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968.

Franklin, John Hope, and Starr, Isidore, eds. The Negro in 20th Century America. New York: Vantage Books, 1967.

Goldstein, Rhoda L., ed. Black Life and Culture in the United States. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971.

Margolis, Edward. Native Sons. Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1968.

Sochen, June, ed. The Black Man and the American Dream. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971.

Quarles, Benjamin. The Negro in the Making of America. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964.